

The testimony of
the Holy Spirit to
the Bible

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THE TESTIMONY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO THE BIBLE.*

I HAVE been asked to explain and defend the Protestant doctrine of the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit to the Bible. In order to bring before us the subject which it is my purpose to unfold, it will be well to state briefly both the Protestant doctrine and the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Rule of Faith. The Protestant doctrine is admirably defined in the answer to the second question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. "The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him." Here the Scriptures are presented as the only, and, therefore, as the supreme rule of religious belief and action. This Protestant doctrine of the rule of faith has been given a striking, portable and easily remembered form, in the statement made by William Chillingworth: "The Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible is the religion of Protestants." Protestantism, therefore, has been acting only in harmony with its doctrine of the rule of faith, in establishing great societies whose sole function is the publication and circulation of the Holy Bible without note or comment.

Over against this Protestant doctrine we must place the Roman Catholic doctrine of the rule of faith. This is clearly stated in the decrees of the Councils of Trent and of the Vatican. From these decrees we learn, that the Roman Catholic church holds and teaches, (1) that God may be certainly known by the light of human reason; (2) that because God has ordained man to a supernatural end, it has pleased Him to reveal Himself by another and supernatural way; (3) that this supernatural revelation is contained in the Bible, and in the unwritten traditions which have come down to us, through the apostles, from the mouth of Christ Himself; (4) that this supernatural revelation, thus embodied in written books and in unwritten tradition, has been delivered to the Church for man; and (5) that it belongs to the Church to authen-

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ticate the Bible and to judge of its true sense and interpretation, and it is permitted to no one to interpret the Scripture contrary to this sense.*

There are many points both of agreement and of opposition between these two doctrines of the rule of faith on which it is not necessary, for the purposes of this lecture, to dwell. I will ask you, however, to fix your minds upon a single point of agreement and a single point of contrast. Both the Protestant and the Roman Catholic churches hold and teach that the Bible embodies a supernatural revelation. This is the point of agreement. The Protestant churches, however, hold that the Bible, embodying this revelation, is given directly to mankind. The Roman Catholic church holds that it is given to the Church for mankind; that it was deposited with the Church in man's behalf; that the Church authenticates it to man by her testimony and interprets it for man by her celestial wisdom. The Roman Catholic church teaches that the revelation to man is mediated by the Church. The Protestant churches teach that it is not so mediated, but is addressed immediately to man. This is the point of contrast.

Out of this difference in their respective doctrines of the rule of faith emerges a profound difference in the religious life of the two great divisions of western Christendom. The religious life of the devout Roman Catholic begins with and is conditioned by his implicit faith in the Church, which holds for him and interprets in his behalf the Bible she authenticates. The religious life of the devout Protestant begins with and is conditioned by his explicit faith in the teachings of the Bible as the Word of God. Moreover, out of this same difference emerges the difference in the respective grounds of their common assurance that the truths of the Bible are indeed the Word of God. Ask an intelligent Catholic Christian the ground of his conviction, and he will reply: it is because the Church authenticates these teachings by her testimony. Ask the Protestant Christian why he has this conviction, and he will tell you that the Bible is its own witness to him; that since he has become a Christian it reveals itself as truth to his heart and conscience. And if, going further back, he shall explain this new experience, he will tell you that, in the last analysis, it is the testimony of the Holy Spirit; that his "full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority of Holy Scripture is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word." † This is that internal testimony of the Holy Spirit to the Bible

* "Dogmatic Decrees of the Vatican Council," chap. ii, Schafl's *Creeeds of Christendom*, Vol. ii, pp. 241, 242.

† *Westminster Confession*, chap. i, sec. v

which the Reformed theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries emphasize so strongly in their controversy with Roman Catholic divines, and on the reality and sufficiency of which our distinctively Protestant Christianity is based. In this view of it, our subject is one of profound interest and importance.

But the subject has a special interest for us to-day. In some of the modern statements of the Protestant doctrine, the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit has been held up as "the test," a "critical test" and "in some respects the most important test of the inspiration and therefore of the canonicity of the individual books of the Bible."* And by one writer, at least, we have even been seriously taught, that the very doubts of some of the Reforming fathers as to the canonicity of certain books of the Bible, which the Church accepts, had their origin in this very testimony of the Holy Spirit working in and with the Word.† In view of statements so remark-

*Stearns' *Evidence of Christian Experience*, p. 318.

†C. A. Briggs, *Presbyterian Review*, July, 1881, pp. 559, 560. Lest it should be thought incredible that Dr. Briggs makes "the testimony and inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit," the source of "*the doubts*" entertained by the reforming fathers concerning the canonicity of certain books of the Bible, which, nevertheless, the Reformed churches accepted and continue to accept as canonical, I quote his remarks at length, italicizing the statements to which I wish to attract particular attention. "The Reformers took their stand as one man for the critical study of the sacred Scriptures . . . and laid down what must be regarded as the fundamental principle of Biblical Criticism. This is best expressed in the 2nd Helvetic Confession, the most honored in the Reformed Church: 'We believe and confess the Canonical Scriptures of the holy Prophets to be the very true Word of God and to have sufficient authority of themselves, not of men' (chap. i). 'Therefore, in controversies of religion or matters of faith we cannot admit any other judge than God himself, pronouncing by the holy Scriptures what is true and what is false; what is to be followed, and what is to be avoided' (chap. ii). The Gallican Confession gives a similar statement: 'We acknowledge these books to be canonical, that is, we account them as the rule and square of our faith, and that not only for the common consent of the Church, but also much more for the testimony and inward persuasion of the Holy Ghost, by whose inspiration we are taught to discern them from other Ecclesiastical books.' Thus while other testimony is valuable and important, yet, the evangelical test of the *canonicity* and interpretation of the Scriptures was, God Himself speaking in and through them to His people. This alone gave the *fides divina*. This was the so-called formal principle of the Reformation, no less important than the so-called material principle of justification.

"The reformers applied this critical test" ['the testimony and inward persuasion of the Holy Ghost,' or 'God speaking in and through the Scriptures to His people' is evidently what Dr. Briggs refers to] "to the traditional theories of the Bible and eliminated the Apocryphal books from the Canon. *They also revised the ancient doubts* as to Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Epistle of James, 2nd Peter, Jude, and the Apocalypse. . . . That the reformers accepted only the present Canon of our symbols excluding the Apocryphal books was due not to the Jewish tradition which they did not hesitate to dispute as they did that of the Church itself; not even to the authority of Jerome, but to the fact that

able as these, it is important not only to assert the reality of the testimony, but accurately to define its nature and its function.

You will observe, then, that the proposition to be expounded and defended is, that the Holy Spirit, the indwelling God, working in and with the Scriptures on the heart and life of the Christian, testifies to the individual Christian that the Bible is the Word of God. In unfolding the subject as thus explained, I shall speak of the *à priori* probability, the Scriptural affirmations, the precise nature, the dogmatic contents and the apologetic value of the testimony of the Holy Spirit to the Bible.

I. I am sure that I need not take much time in making clear the *à priori* probability or strong presumption, first, that God will accompany a revelation of His will with evidence sufficient to make its acceptance obligatory; and, secondly, that to the person who does accept it He will increase the evidence to a degree that will consti-

they went further back than Jerome to the evangelical Christian and Hebrew principle of *the common consent of the believing children of God which, in course of time, eliminated the sacred canonical books from those of a merely national and temporal character, because they approved themselves to their souls as the very Word of God.* This evangelical critical test *did not solve all questions. It left in doubt several writings already mentioned.*"

So far Dr. Briggs. The careful reader of the paragraph will not fail to notice the hesitation of Dr. Briggs' mind when expounding his own thesis. That thesis is: "The evangelical critical test of the *canonicity* of the Scriptures is God Himself speaking in and through them to His people;" or, "The testimony and inward persuasion of the Holy Ghost is the evangelical critical test of the *canonicity* of the Scriptures." But when this critical test is applied by the reformers, "*they doubt!*" as to the *canonicity* of Esther, 2d Peter, etc. Hence *the doubts* of the reformers concerning the *canonicity* of these books (which the Church then accepted and now accepts as canonical) sprang from "the testimony and persuasion of the Holy Ghost," considered either as positive or as negative testimony. That is to say, either the Holy Ghost positively testified and persuaded the reformers to doubt the *canonicity* of these now accepted books, or the Holy Ghost while He persuaded them to accept the rest of the Canon, failed to persuade them to accept the "already mentioned" books. In either case the source of *the doubts* of the reformers concerning books now in the Canon, was the Holy Spirit.

The paragraph leads one to believe that Dr. Briggs, even while composing it, became dissatisfied with his own formula of "the evangelical critical test of *canonicity*;" for toward the paragraph's conclusion the formula is changed. Instead of the internal testimony and persuasion of the Holy Ghost, working by and with the Word on the believer, the critical test of *canonicity* is, at last, a continuing and cumulative historical process; culminating and emerging in the "*common consent of the believing children of God which, in the course of time, eliminated the sacred canonical books from those of a merely national and temporary character, because they approved themselves to their souls as the very Word of God.*" Unfortunately Dr. Briggs' change of formula does not make his doctrine of "the evangelical critical test of *canonicity*" any more acceptable; and it does render it less intelligible. Does he mean that in "the course of time" *since* the reformers there has, through "the common consent of the believing chil-

tute it a divine certification. It would seem to lie in the very nature of a revelation of truth and duty, that it bear with it evidence of its character, sufficient to leave those to whom it is addressed without excuse for its rejection. Such evidence may either accompany the revelation as an external witness; or it may lie in the qualities of the revelation itself. Like the testimony of the Church, it may be something distinct from the record of God's revealed will; or, like "the heavenliness of the Bible's matter, the efficacy of its doctrine, the majesty of its style and the consent of all its parts,"* it may give quality to the record itself. But whether external and historical, or internal and literary, or both; there is no presumption that the evidence by which God shall make men responsible for rejecting His revelation will be demonstrative, or anything like demonstrative, in its force; for demonstrative proof is never necessary to create responsibility. It is quite enough that probability be shown. It

dren of God," been an elimination of the "canonical" books from the merely "temporary" books? He cannot mean this, for where is the evidence of such "common consent?" What about the "consent" of John Henry Newman and his fellow Roman Catholics who are "believing children of God?" Has there been any such "common consent?" Is not Christendom divided as to the question, "what are the canonical books?" very much as it was when the reformers "doubted?" The truth is that there has been no "course of time" since the "reformers" at the close of which "the believing children of God" reached a "common consent" as to the "canonical books" because "they approved themselves to their souls as the very Word of God," or for any other reason. Does he then mean that in "the course of time" *before* the reformers lived, there was, through "the common consent of the believing children of God," an "elimination of the canonical from the temporary books," a settlement of the Canon therefore? Then it follows that after this settlement of the Canon by "common consent," the "reformers" under "the testimony and persuasion of the Holy Spirit," which is the "evangelical critical test of canonicity," *broke up* the "common consent of God's believing children," and unsettled the settled Canon, by "doubting" the canonicity of some of the already eliminated canonical books. Still, the "reformers" are not to be criticised for "doubting." For "the evangelical critical test did not settle all questions. It left in doubt several writings already mentioned;" and this although it had beforehand settled the Canon, by "eliminating," "in the course of time," "the sacred canonical books."

I am bound to believe that Dr. Briggs would be puzzled, if he were to attempt an interpretation of his paragraph, that would leave the paragraph consistent with itself. His elaboration of his thesis reveals great confusion of mind in respect to the subject. To say this is not to deny either his ability or his scholarship. A man far abler and more scholarly than Dr. Briggs' most ardent admirers believe him to be would be as much confused as Dr. Briggs evidently was, were he to attempt what Dr. Briggs attempted. For Dr. Briggs tried to put the great reformed doctrine of "the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit to the Bible" to a use for which it was not designed and for which it is not at all fitted. He tried to use it as the critical test of a quality, "canonicity," the presence or absence of which must, in the nature of the case, be tested by historical considerations. When he made this attempt, he, of course, fell into confusion.

* *West. Conf.*, i. 5.

is quite enough in order to compel action as a duty that, in a matter of practical moment, even a low degree of probability be present. For, not demonstration, but "probability is the guide of life." And since God, on the one hand, has given to us the testimony of the Church to the Bible; and, on the other hand, has impressed on it qualities by which it abundantly evidences itself to be the Word of God; He has more than satisfied the presumption concerning the testimony by which men will be bound in morality to accept the Bible as God's Word.

But it is also a presumption, that, for those who have accepted it, this evidence will be increased by new and different testimony; testimony of a kind which cannot be understood except through acceptance; testimony of a force which will amount to a divine certification; testimony which will produce in the soul what has been called "Christian certainty," and what the Westminster divines call the "full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority of the Holy Scripture." It is reasonable to suppose that God will manifest the truth of His Word to the believer, as He does not to the world; that he, who has been led through the probable proof to believe God's Word, will find, in his new supernatural experience formed by and with the Word, a firm and broad basis for the Christian assurance. I say, there is a strong presumption of this kind. For there is this addition of testimony when other truth is accepted and made the rule of conduct. There is the same verification of accepted truth by means of experience in scientific investigation and practical living. Why, then, may we not reasonably prophesy, if the Bible be God's Word, that there will be a like addition of evidence to the apprehension of the believer; an addition that will give to the evidence the force of demonstration, and that will create in the believer the experience of absolute spiritual rest and certitude?

II. And now if we open the Scriptures themselves, we shall find them confirming this presumption by abundant statements. These statements, which assure the disciple of the new verification of the Word, are closely associated with the Holy Spirit, the indwelling God. He is represented in them as a teacher, a witness, a comforter, a guide; who, in all His work in the disciple, will confirm the disciple both in his acceptance of the truth, and in his assurance of his own blessed relation to it. In the greatest of our Lord's discourses to His disciples, He assures them that the Spirit of truth abides in them and shall be with them; that this Holy Spirit shall teach them all things; that He shall bear witness of Christ Himself; that He shall guide them into the truth; that He shall take the things of Christ and declare them unto them.

These are wonderful statements. We cannot fathom the whole of their significance. But this at least we can see, and see at once: that they are the assurance of Jesus that when He shall have gone away, God as the witness to His own revelation will not have gone. For God, the Holy Spirit, will come, and will dwell in the disciple; and to the disciple's spirit will bear spiritual and convincing testimony to the revealed truth and will of God. So the apostolic writers interpreted these sublime words of the Master. When, for example, St. Paul would explain the Christian's assurance of his adoption into God's redeemed family; he does it by the statement, "The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." When he would account for the difference between most men's deadness to spiritual things and the vital apprehension of spiritual truth characteristic of the Christian; he does it by asserting that while the natural mind cannot apprehend spiritual truth, because it is spiritually discerned, God has revealed it to the Christian by His Spirit.

I need not, I am sure, try to exhaust the catalogue of Biblical statements, which affirm the reality and convincing force of the testimony of the Spirit to the distinctive truths of God's Word. As all of us know, the New Testament contains many special passages affirming it, and the volume is pervaded by the doctrine. There is a testimony of the Holy Ghost to the Bible, if the Bible itself be true; a testimony to the truth of the Bible; an internal testimony; a testimony borne to the individual Christian; a testimony so convincing as to overbear the temptations to disbelief and the hesitations of doubt; so powerful as to produce legitimately the full persuasion and absolute assurance that this Bible is the supernatural and authoritative Word of God; a direct testimony also; a testimony not mediated by the Church; a testimony in whose delivery and reception the infinite Spirit and the finite spirit come into immediate communion without the intervention of Church, or priest, or sacraments, or altar. The Biblical warrant for the doctrine is abundant; and, therefore, there is abundant Biblical warrant for the basis of our Protestant Christianity.

III. Having had before us the strong presumption and the Scriptural affirmations of the testimony of the Holy Spirit to the Bible, we are prepared to study the nature of this witness-bearing. I do not now speak of the contents of the testimony. I am not to answer the question, What does the Spirit testify? but the question, How does He testify at all? What does the Bible mean by the expression, "the Spirit witnessing with our spirits?" What does the Confession mean by the phrase, "the Holy Spirit bearing witness in our hearts, that this is the Word of God?"

At this point, great care needs to be exercised in the interpretation of both the Biblical and the Confessional declarations and of Christian experience. As I have already pointed out, the New Testament contains many statements that, in testifying to the truth, the infinite and Divine Spirit comes into immediate contact with the finite and human spirit; that the two beings are in direct communion, the one testifying and the other persuaded and assured by the testimony. There is, on the basis of Theism, no more credible statement to be made; but there is no other credible statement so full of mystery. We know absolutely nothing of the methods by which one spirit influences another without the employment of the senses. So long as the activity of our senses conditions communication between our minds and other human minds, we must reverently acknowledge the unfathomable mystery in the operations of the Holy Ghost. Because of this mystery the danger is great that the doctrine will be misapprehended.

It is important, therefore, first of all, to deny that the Spirit testifies to the Bible by communicating to the Christian a proposition; the proposition, for example: "The Bible is the Word of God." If the Spirit communicated such a proposition to the Christian, the analogue of the Spirit's testimony to the Bible would be the verbal testimony of a human witness to a particular historical fact. We must exclude from our minds such a conception of the Spirit's testimony. The Protestant Churches have never taught it; and the Bible contains no promise that this kind of testimony will be given to the Christian by the Holy Spirit. Men have, indeed, claimed that they received from God supernatural audible or visible communications. When Lord Herbert of Cherbury was about to publish a volume antagonizing Christianity, he asked of God, so he tells us, a communication that would justify his intention; and he assures us that he received it. Enthusiasts within, as well as without the Church, have claimed to be the recipients of direct propositional communications from the living God. But this is not the Protestant doctrine of the testimony of the Spirit. And if it were it could not accurately be described by the phrase; "The testimony of the Spirit." For in the first place, such a communication would be the testimony of a miracle rather than the testimony of the Spirit. It would take its place among the signs and wonders wrought in the sphere of nature, not among those wrought in the sphere of the spiritual life. It would be like the outward voice from heaven testifying to the divine mission of Jesus Christ. It would find its place properly at the beginning of a dispensation, and not in the continuing life of the Church. In the second place, the communication of such a proposition to the individual soul would

not be testimony to a revelation ; it would itself be a revelation. It would be the authentication of a revelation by another revelation to individuals inspired to receive it. And the history of the Christian life would include the history of a supernatural revelation and inspiration, repeated in the case of every Christian. We do not need to be told that Protestant Christianity is not founded on this perversion of Scripture. And in the third place, such a communication would itself need to be proved divine. For how otherwise would the disciple, who should hear the inward voice, know it to be the voice of God ?

It must be denied, also, that either the Bible or Protestantism teaches that the testimony of the Spirit consists in the mere emerging into consciousness of the feeling and assurance that the Bible is the Word of God ; the sudden, and, if I may use the word, irrational conviction that God has spoken through the Old and New Testaments. This view has been held by individual theologians, but never by the Church ; the view, namely, that the Holy Spirit, working in an ineffable manner upon our hearts, directly and without means, causes, that without hesitation we assent to the truths of the Bible ; that the Spirit thus produces an assurance above all human judgment ; an assurance utterly unrelated to human reasoning, and needing for its maintenance no further arguments and testimonies.* But from the point of view of Protestantism there are two serious objections to this conception of the nature of the Spirit's testimony. In the first place it is not testimony at all. It is not the witness of the Spirit. It is a work performed directly upon the judgment. It is the supernatural implanting in the disciple's heart of a conclusion, without bringing to his attention the premises in which the conclusion is implicated. John Owen, in criticising this theory, well says, "This hath not the proper nature of a *testimony*. A divine work it may be, a divine testimony it is not." Moreover, the assurance alleged to be so wrought cannot be accurately described as faith ; for faith, whether human and historical, or divine and supernatural, is the assent of the soul in response to testimony ; and such a work would not be testimony. In the second place, such a conviction, emerging in the soul without any known cause or reason, would in the nature of the case need itself authentication ; nor would there be any way of determining whether or not its author is God.

And now to speak positively : the teaching of Scripture and of the Church is, that the testimony of the Holy Spirit to the Bible is the saving work of the Holy Spirit in individual men, in association with

* See the view as described and criticised in John Owen's *Reason of Faith*, Works, London, 1826, Vol. iii, p. 300.

the Bible itself. The Holy Spirit, when applying the benefits of Christ's redemption, saving men from the guilt and dominion of sin, works by and with the Word of God; and produces a supernatural experience not only congruous to the Word, but inexplicable and impossible, unless the Bible be God's Word. Hence, every one who is the subject of this experience, is assured by the Holy Spirit's work that Holy Scripture is the embodiment of God's special revelation. The Westminster divines taught this when they said that while the testimony of the Church awakens great reverence for the Scripture, and while the traits of Scripture show it to be the Word of God, "yet notwithstanding our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts." The Holy Spirit, the indwelling God, by and with the Word, creates an experience conformed to the Word, and so, honoring and confirming it, testifies that it is the Word of God.

It is important to note, at this point, the analogy between this testimony and the other direct testimonies to Christianity. Bishop Butler, in his *Analogy*, tells us, that "in the evidence of Christianity there seem to be several things of great weight not reducible to the head either of miracles or the completion of prophecy, but these two, miracles and fulfilled prophecy, are its direct and fundamental proofs, and those other things, however considerable they are, ought never to be urged apart from these two direct proofs." The testimony of a miracle is the authentication of a divine message by a divine *work*. And the testimony of a completed prophecy is also the authentication of a divine message by a divine *work*. In neither case is the revelation authenticated by another revelation, but by a work. In the same way, the *work* of the Holy Spirit testifies to and authenticates the Bible as God's message to the finite spirit. Taking the three divine testimonies together, it is interesting to observe, that the miracle is a creative work in the sphere of nature; that the completion of prophecy is a providential work in the sphere of history; and that the gracious activity of the Holy Ghost is a spiritual work in the sphere of individual life; all direct works of God, and all testifying to the great fact that the doctrines of the Bible are the Word of God. The testimony of the Spirit, therefore, though borne to individual believers, and not immediately apprehended by the world as a supernatural work, takes its place side by side with the two great public, direct and fundamental proofs of Christianity—completed prophecy and miracles: and it is as cogent a proof to those to whom it is borne as would be the answer of history to a divine prediction, or a miracle such as the resurrection of a man from the dead.

As the testimony of the Spirit to the Bible is His gracious work in the heart of the believer, it is the testimony of the distinctively Christian experience to Christianity. The distinctively Christian experiences—the renewal of the will, the transformation of the life, the sense of forgiveness and of acceptance with God, the peace with God, the joy in prayer and communion with God, the comfort in affliction, the extinguished or diminished fear of death, the conquest of appetite and passion, the successful resistance to temptation, the developing saintliness of life and thought and feeling, the ability to undergo self-sacrifice,—these, as they are formed upon and nourished by the Word of God, are the work of the Spirit, and are the direct testimony of the Spirit to the Bible. Just in the proportion in which they are real and vital and abounding is there a full persuasion of the infallible truth and divine authority of Holy Scripture.

This, though private and individual in its very nature, is the strongest and the perpetually enduring and increasing testimony of God to the truth of the Bible. It has enabled millions since St. Paul to employ the language of absolute knowledge when expressing belief (for here faith is transmuted into knowledge; the highest knowledge; the knowledge of experience), and to say, “I *know* whom I have believed,” and “I *know* that all things work together for good to them that love God.” This is that “divine faith” in the Word of God which no critical attacks upon the Bible can destroy. And we may therefore assure ourselves that, however many and violent and persistent such assaults shall continue to be; if only this experience shall be repeated and shall abide in the world, if only the Holy Spirit shall continue, working by and with the Word, to give to men peace with God, and joy in affliction, and hope in the hour of death, the Bible will continue to be accepted as infallibly true and of supreme authority.

Because this testimony is the gracious work of the Spirit producing the distinctively Christian experience, the greatest duty of the Church is to seek by prayer and every means in its possession the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; such an outpouring as will issue in a new evangelical revival. This is the profoundest need of the time as it is of all time. Apologetics is valuable; Biblical study is valuable; the exploration of the texts and of the monuments is of high importance; but the doubt of the times will not be dissipated and the infidelity of the times will not be overcome, until, in a spiritual revival, the indwelling God shall testify anew by His gracious work, to the divine origin and supreme authority of the Bible.

In many respects our religious condition is like that of Great Britain a century and a half ago: when the Presbyterian Church

of Scotland was under the sway of the moderatism which had reduced Christianity to "a couple of starved and hunger-bitten dogmas;" when the Presbyterian Churches of England had lapsed into a denial of the supreme divinity of our Lord; when the reigning philosophy was the irreligious deism of Bolingbroke; when the favorite poem was Bolingbroke's philosophy done into verse in *The Essay on Man*; when the *Universal Prayer* of Pope voiced the common religious aspirations; and when the attitude towards supernatural religion in the form of Christianity was such that Bishop Butler felt bound to say: "It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted by many persons that Christianity is not so much as a subject of inquiry; but that it is now at length discovered to be fictitious. Accordingly, they treat it as if in the present age this were an agreed point among all people of discernment." To meet this condition, great apologies were written; and Christianity was vindicated to the reason as the absolute and exclusive religion in the Boyle Lectures, in the *Evidences* of Paley, in the *Short Method with the Deists*, and in the great *Analogy*. Great is our indebtedness to these able and faithful defenders of the faith. But the spiritual condition of Great Britain, as described by Bishop Butler, was not revolutionized by apologetics. It was the testimony of the Spirit to the Bible in the *great evangelical revival* that changed the face of English society and opened the modern era of missions, of charities and of the enfranchisement of the masses. "God spake the Word and great was the company of the preachers:" and the Spirit of God, working by and with the Word, bore witness so mightily, that the mode of infidelity then prevailing was swept away like noxious vapor before the rising sun. And so it will be now, if only Christians will labor with apostolic zeal and will pray for the Spirit with apostolic faith and importunity.

IV. I turn now to the contents of the testimony, and must answer briefly the question; To what, precisely, does the Spirit bear witness? This is the point at which at present there is a sharp division of opinion. At least, the answer to this question will reveal what I feel bound to characterize as a perversion of the great doctrine of the Spirit's testimony. It is contended, as I have already said, that the testimony of the Spirit is the great test, the critical test of the canonicity of the several books of the Bible; and one writer has gone so far in this direction as to teach that the Holy Spirit working by and with the Word in our hearts is the source of the very doubts of some of our fathers concerning the canonicity of some of the books which nevertheless the Church received.

It is not necessary to dwell long on this contention. It is evident, from what has been said, that in the saving and gracious

work of the Holy Spirit in the heart, by and with the Word,—the work in which He bears His testimony—that, exactly, which He authenticates is the Biblical way of salvation; the individual soul's relation to God as a sinner, as a convicted, a regenerated, a justified sinner; first bowed down by a sense of guilt, then justified by faith in the atoning Christ, then, and therefore, at peace with God and with his own moral constitution. You will observe, that what the Spirit authenticates is a series of practical and profound truths in their relation to the individual who apprehends them. It is simply preposterous to say that the Spirit conveys the slightest information concerning, or that His work bears testimony, except mediately, to any of the literary phenomena of any particular *record* of these truths. The soul in whom the Spirit bears witness may have come into contact with these supernatural truths in this record or in that record; in the sermon of a missionary, in a tract handed by a *colporteur*, in the anxious pleadings of a parent or a friend, or in the Bible itself. The Holy Spirit can, and, as a matter of fact does make use of either. For the particular content of His testimony is concerning the saving truth which all contain, and not concerning the particular record which embodies it. The fact, ascertained by independent and external evidence, that the Bible is the original record of this truth, does, indeed, make the Spirit's testimony to the truth a testimony to the Bible. But the Spirit does not testify to the historical fact that the Bible is that original record. Whether it is or is not is a historical question, which must be answered by historical, not by spiritual testimony. Here the resources of scholarship must be invoked. The contention, that the testimony of the Spirit revealed in Christian experience is the test of canonicity, is as wide of the mark, and is an error of the same kind, as the contention that the musical enjoyment of the music of Handel's *Messiah* is testimony to the historical fact that Handel was its author; which is nonsense.

But it is contended also that the Holy Spirit in Christian experience bears witness to the divine *inspiration* of the Biblical books; and, since an *inspired* book is, because of its inspiration, canonical, that He bears witness through inspiration to canonicity. This is quite as obvious an error. When the Spirit in His gracious work bears witness to the truth of a Gospel sermon, He does not testify to that sermon's divine inspiration; for the sermon, it is conceded, is not an inspired product. He testifies to the saving truth which the sermon embodies. This is his function in respect to the Bible. It is the Bible's truth and supreme authority, not its inspiration and not its Canon, that He thus mightily authenticates. The canonicity of the books of the Bible is determined by historical

investigation. The inspiration of the Bible is ascertained from the Bible's teaching concerning itself. History testifies to the Canon. The Bible testifies to its own inspiration. The Holy Spirit, in his almighty gracious and saving work, testifies to the divine character and absolute authority of the saving truth which the Bible embodies; to the divine truth that God has no pleasure in the death of the sinner; to the truth that God is in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself not imputing their trespasses unto them; to the truth that all things are ours for we are Christ's and Christ is God's. And He testifies to this truth by creating an experience congruous to it, and to be accounted for only by its truth. He testifies to this truth wherever recorded and whenever proclaimed, by prophet, by apostle, by preacher, by teacher, by parent or by friend. And, after all, it is the truth of the Bible that is of the highest import. It is the truth of the way of salvation, not history of its record, that all moral beings can appreciate. And therefore it is, that the testimony of the Spirit to the truth of the Bible can be borne to the wise and the unwise, the learned and the ignorant; and Christianity, though based on and implicated in tremendous and exceptional facts of history, can, through the Spirit's testimony in the experience of the Christian, be universally authenticated as the absolute and universal religion.

V. There is one more question connected with this subject which, in closing, I must answer briefly. What place does this testimony of the Spirit occupy among the evidences of Christianity? What is its apologetic value? The testimony of the Spirit is, as I have pointed out, the gracious work of the Holy Spirit applying the work of Christ to the individual, and producing the distinctively Christian experience. The question before us, therefore, is the question whether the Christian experience has a place among the evidences of Christianity? And if it has, what is its distinctive value?

In these days it were not just,—certainly it would be unjust for me,—to take up this question without mentioning the labors of a lamented and highly valued friend of my own; labors undertaken by him in order to give to this evidence scientific statement, and to point out its proper place in apologetics. I am referring, of course, to the lectures of the late Prof. Lewis French Stearns, of Bangor Theological Seminary, one of the most gifted and learned of our younger theologians, and one of the saintliest of characters. His ability, his attainments and the moral qualities, candor and charity, made all that he wrote interesting and valuable; but his own profound and vivid religious life peculiarly fitted him to write exceptionally well on this subject; and he has left to the Church a

volume of great value, though I have already indicated my disagreement with him in his conclusion, that Christian experience can be employed as a test of canonicity. This conclusion, as I have tried to show, is an error; and I am confident that it is a dangerous error. But the volume, as a whole, has, in an eloquent manner, called the attention of the Church to the most important of the evidences of Christianity, and may serve to show to her the hidings of her power. How, indeed, can we doubt the immense apologetic value of the Christian life and experience, when we recall the words of the Lord Jesus, in which He not only acknowledged their evidential force, but made it the duty of His disciples to exhibit the evidence? "Let your light shine before men, that they seeing your good works may glorify your Father which is in heaven."

But here we must make a distinction between the apologetic value of the testimony of the Spirit to the Christian himself on the one hand, and the apologetic value of the Christian experience wrought by the Spirit in commending Christianity to the world on the other. The apologetic value of the testimony of the Spirit to the Christian himself is absolute. For the testimony of the Spirit is a work. It is the transformation of probable knowledge into real knowledge by experiment or experience. When a man receives and rests upon Christ, the result is that an experience is begun within him precisely answering to the Word of God. He is a new man, with new hopes and aims and consolations; he has peace with God, the love of Christ, the sense of forgiveness, and the anticipation of holiness and heaven which the Bible promises, and in this experience he cannot but be assured of the divine origin and supreme authority of the Bible. To a man with this experience the Bible is its own highest evidence. The Church is not needed to authenticate its truths. For these truths, appearing in his own experience, are far better known to him as divine truths than the visible Church is known as a divine institution. Therefore our fathers rightly held that the Church must be tested by the Scriptures; not the Scriptures by the Church. For to test the Scriptures by the Church would be to test what is best and most surely known by what is far less surely known.

But what is the apologetic value of this Christian experience in commending Christianity to the world? In answering this question it must be said, that if the Christian experience were simply an assurance to the Christian of the truth of the Bible and nothing more, the Christian experience could not have any apologetic value. But the Christian experience is far more than such an assurance. It is a characteristic and complex life; a life which emerges in distinctive conduct; in works of faith and in labors of

love and in the patience of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. So understood, there is no other apologetic for Christianity so forceful, so continuous; no other has been so blessed of God. In the proportion in which the distinctively Christian experience has been manifested in conduct, in that proportion has Christianity won believers from the world. For although it is scientifically true that the natural man cannot discern the things of the Spirit in themselves, though they are foolishness unto him because they are spiritually discerned; yet whenever this spiritual life issues, as it must issue, in appropriate conduct in the sphere of the world, then the natural man can compare the Christian worldly life with the world's worldly life. He needs only his moral constitution to discern and to be wooed by its celestial beauty. This is the teaching of our Lord Himself. Though He taught that men must be born again of the Spirit in order to appreciate heavenly things, yet He taught also, that when this heavenly life bore its characteristic moral fruit, men could discern its superiority, and men would discern it; men would see the good works of His disciples, and seeing them would glorify the Father in heaven. Thus, the testimony of the Spirit to the Bible reaches the intellect and the heart of the world, when the saving work of the Spirit issues in the lofty and consistent spiritual and moral activities of Christian men and women. This external manifestation of the inner life of the Spirit through all the Church's history has been, to-day is and until the consummation of all things must continue to be the most powerful of the evidences of Christianity in its influence on the world.

Thus, on the one hand, the Spirit's gracious work on the Christian is, for the Christian, God's highest and most direct testimony to the Bible; and, on the other, the Christian himself, in his life of prayer, of lofty spiritual aspiration, of purity, of honesty, of self-sacrificing labor for men's highest and eternal good, is the most convincing evidence of Christianity that the Church can offer to the world to-day.

Amid the doubts and trepidations, amid the debates and questionings of the hour, we need have small fear for the Bible. God is daily testifying in every quarter of the globe, by His gracious work in the believer and by the believer's outward life, to its truth. Wherever a Christian, through faith in Christ, is sincerely fighting against sin within him and around him, and, in the joy of his reconciliation with God, is doing the work and living the life and manifesting the spirit of Jesus, there stands to-day the Bible's greatest defender; his career the Bible's highest defense; the Christian himself is that great apology for Christianity, which has con-

vinced uncounted millions in the past, and which is destined to bring the race into captivity to the Son of God.

Therefore, on the Church to-day, in view of the prevalence of doubt, if not of disbelief, are devolved these two great and special duties. The first is the duty of earnest, importunate continuous prayer for the descent of the Holy Ghost; prayer that the indwelling God Himself will, as in the past, by his own gracious saving work, bear witness in the hearts of vast numbers to the infallible truth and supreme authority of Holy Scripture. Now, more than at any other time within the recollection of the living, do Christians need to pray, in faith and without ceasing, for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; remembering that the prayer of the righteous avail-eth; that God loves importunity in petition; that the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. The second is the old and ever new duty of living lives worthy of our Christian belief and experience. The testimony of the Spirit is secret and individual. It can be known to the world only as mediated in pure and lofty and self-sacrificing Christian lives. The apologetic value of such lives is invaluable, for "the argument of a consistent and beautiful life is unanswerable." We may be sure that if the Church is faithful to these great duties, God will give her increase. If they are performed, the doubts that oppress the present years will pass away; and the Word of God will be clearly seen to be moving on, in the name of Christ, to its predestined conquest of the world He came to save.

PRINCETON.

JOHN DEWITT.

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